

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
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FM AMEMBASSY ASUNCION

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2711

INFO AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES

AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO

S E C R E T ASUNCION 1359

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: SHUM, PA

SUBJ: PROGRESS ON HUMAN RIGHTS

1. OUR HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY HAS CAUSED A RIFT WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT OF PARAGUAY. THE INTERNAL DEBATE, WHICH CONTAINS MANY ELEMENTS OF A POWER STRUGGLE, REVOLVES ABOUT WHETHER TO ADMIT THE INTER AMERICAN HUMAN RIGHTS COMMISSION (IAHRC). WHEN IT IS MADE, THE DECISION WILL TRANSCEND THE IMMEDIATE ISSUE OF THE IAHRC VISIT; IT WILL GO A LONG WAY TOWARDS DETERMINING THE DIRECTION THE STROESSNER REGIME WILL TAKE ON THE ENTIRE COMPASS OF HUMAN RIGHTS PROBLEMS IN PARAGUAY. IF THE DECISION IS NOT TO ADMIT THE IAHRC, STROESSNER WILL HAVE HEEDED THE HARDLINERS WHO ADVOCATE OFFICIALLY-SPONSORED TERRORISM AS ESSENTIAL TO THE MAINTENANCE OF TOTAL CONTROL. IF THE DECISION IS TO RECEIVE THE COMMISSION, STROESSNER WILL HAVE SIGNALLED TWO IMPORTANT POLICY DIRECTIONS: FIRST, HE WILL HAVE REINFORCED THE MORE PROGRESSIVE FORCES WHO ARGUE THAT BRUTAL AND ILLEGAL PRACTICES ARE BOTH UNNECESSARY AND COSTLY; AND, SECONDLY, HE WILL HAVE GIVEN PUBLIC NOTICE THAT HE IS WILLING TO RISK THE SERIOUS DISPLEASURE OF BRAZIL, ARGENTINA AND URUGUAY RATHER THAN RISK ALIENATION OF HIS REGIME FROM THE UNITED STATES.

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2. THE EXCELLENT INR REPORT ON PARAGUAY OF MARCH 9 ASSERTS THAT "STROESSNER MAY BE WILLING TO IMPROVE PARAGUAY'S RECORD IF PRESSURE FROM THE U.S. AND OTHER SOURCES IS SUSTAINED." I CONTEND THAT THE RECORD HAS ALREADY BEGUN TO SHOW IMPROVEMENT AND I AM CONFIDENT THAT, ABSENT SOME SURPRISE DEVELOPMENT, STROESSNER WILL APPROVE A VISIT OF THE IAHRC PRIOR TO THE JUNE

MEETING OF THE OAS GENERAL ASSEMBLY.

3. IT IS IMPORTANT TO REALIZE WHAT OUR FIRM STANCE HAS HELPED TO ACHIEVE.

- THE LAST MASS ARREST TOOK PLACE IN MID-DECEMBER, 1977, WHEN NINETEEN LABOR LEADERS WERE ARRESTED AND SOME TORTURED. BECAUSE OF U.S. OFFICIAL AND TRADE UNION PRESSURES, ALL GAINED THEIR RELEASE IN FEBRUARY, 1978.
- THE FIVE SO-CALLED TERRORISTS WHO HAD SOUGHT ASYLUM OVER THE PAST YEAR IN VARIOUS LATIN AMERICAN EMBASSIES HAVE ALL RECEIVED OFFICIAL SAFE CONDUCTS OUT OF THE COUNTRY. FOR THE FIRST TIME IN OVER A YEAR THERE ARE NO POLITICAL ASYLEES IN THE EMBASSIES OF ASUNCION.
- THUS FAR IN 1978, THE GOVERNMENT HAS MADE ONLY SEVEN ARRESTS FOR POLITICAL CAUSES AND THREE OF THESE HAVE BEEN RELEASED.
- THERE HAS BEEN A NET REDUCTION OF 47 POLITICAL PRISONERS. SOME OF THOSE RELEASED HAD BEEN IN PRISON FOR MANY YEARS.
- BEGINNING WITH THE BOGADO GONDRA CASE IN 1977, THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM HAS COME TO BE THE ACCEPTED MANNER OF PROCESSING NEW POLITICAL PRISONERS.
- THE GOVERNMENT HAS CEASED ITS TRANSPARENT EFFORTS TO PUBLICIZE ITS SUPPOSED SUCCESS IN CRUSHING THE "PRIMERO DE MARZO" PLOT - WIDELY BELIEVED TO HAVE BEEN A POLICE FABRICATION.

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4. I HAVE NOT REQUESTED ANY EASING OF OUR STANCE ON PARAGUAY BECAUSE OF THIS HEARTENING TREND FOR I AM SKEPTICAL THAT THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS ARRESTED WITHOUT CAUSE AND HELD WITHOUT DUE PROCESS SHOULD BE REWARDED. I DO RECOMMEND, HOWEVER, THAT WE REACT POSITIVELY WHEN THE DECISION IS MADE TO ADMIT THE IAHR. I REALIZE THAT IN A LIMITED SENSE A FAVORABLE DECISION WOULD BE ONLY THE FULFILLMENT OF A COMMITMENT ALREADY MADE. BUT THE PRESSURES NOT TO FULFILL THIS COMMITMENT ARE INTENSE. THE URGINGS FROM BRAZIL ARE UNRELENTING. AT HOME MANY MILITARY LEADERS AND COLORADO PARTY STALWARTS ARE BITTERLY OPPOSED TO AN IAHR VISIT. THEREFORE, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THE DEPARTMENT SEE THIS DECISION, WHEN IT COMES, AS A CRUCIAL ACT IN A PROCESS WHICH I BELIEVE WILL ORIENT THE GOVERNMENT TOWARDS A POLICY OF INCREASED RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS. ONCE THE VISIT IS ACCOMPLISHED, WE CAN THEN SET OUR SIGHTS ON ACHIEVING REMOVAL OF THE STATE OF SIEGE AND SOME CHANGES IN LAW ENFORCEMENT PERSONNEL AND PRACTICE. I HAVE ALREADY BEGUN CONVERSATIONS WITH SEVERAL INFLUENTIAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS REGARDING THE DISADVANTAGES OF CONTINUATION OF THE STATE OF SIEGE.

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